

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE

DIVISION OF HOUSING AND
TOWN PLANNING

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING
NOVEMBER 30, 1926



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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE

HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING

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REPORT OF THE DIVISION OF HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING

There are now ninety-five planning boards in Massachusetts, as against eighty-one a year ago, a gain of fourteen boards. Much interest is being shown in a number of other places. The experience of some of these, who now seriously regret that they did not act sooner, is indicative of the probable experience of other places, where the need is great, but where the officials and the people are yet indifferent.

The division is in touch with many interested people and is constantly bringing the matter to the attention of officials in places with no boards, in the hope that action may be taken before greater damage is done.

Boards are being urged to lay down at least the main features of a major plan at the same time that zoning schemes are being prepared. They are advised to include at least the correction of the present street system to the extent of straightening the more dangerous curves, eliminating jogs, continuing dead-end streets, and laying down the main thoroughfares which will be needed for the future development of the community.

This is all important as the best means of solving present traffic problems and of meeting those of the future, and it is particularly important that it be done now, before new buildings in the locations of needed changes multiply the costs by many fold.

The smallest place to establish a board had 489 inhabitants at the time. Small places frequently think they need do nothing, but we find that modern traffic problems affect the whole state, and that no place is so small as to be entirely free from them. Moreover, the best time to solve a traffic problem is before it develops.

Seven places required by law to have boards, as shown in the table on page 5 are still without them. These places, running from 11,798 to 47,247 inhabitants, have problems which make their attitude difficult to understand.

Some places state that they established boards only to comply with the law, with the definite understanding that the boards should do nothing. Such places must expect difficulties. This is also true of places

where boards are not required but have been established. One such board says: "There is a planning board appointed by the selectmen. If there are any problems to solve the selectmen attend to them. We are not called upon at all. We have no meetings."

In this connection it should be noted that the law requires boards to be elected at the annual town meeting, and that every board should develop opinion on the town's problems in order that they may be handled before it is too late. A planning board is not expected to wait until matters are referred to it. Under the law it is required to make studies of the needs of the town and to recommend such action as it deems wise. If a board's recommendations are ignored, they should be repeated. When the town finally sees the need of action, the board may not be accused of neglect of duty if it persists in its recommendations. It isn't good citizenship, just as it isn't good sportsmanship, to quit if things do not go right.

To aid in the work the division has issued a revised and enlarged edition of Bulletin 1, Planning Boards and Their Work, has reprinted an account of one of the best examples of planning before any building was done—Palos Verdes, and has held many conferences with groups and individuals on how to get boards established and how to get actual schemes started.

Forty-seven (47) places have full or rudimentary zoning. Practically all this has been accomplished in four years. Four years ago there were seven zoned places, but five of them have largely re-done their work and another is planning to do so. The result is that forty-five places have taken their major action during the past four years.

The outstanding development in regard to zoning is the increased interest of the people in its administration. After years of search for a satisfactory method of regulating municipal growth, the people are asking whether the zoning idea is to be side-tracked and rendered useless, as has been the case with the law of 1692, still on our statute books and almost never used.

There are places making very little use of their zoning schemes. Some of them already count their violations by the tens. Generally, however, the results are more than measuring up to expectations. The defect is partial in some cases, where administrative boards or officials are in part indifferent, or are influenced by interested parties. When a building inspector, for example, tries to enforce a law and is entirely ignored by the local law officer, it is difficult. The courts, however, will give relief through *mandamus* and the people will have to choose between securing efficient officers or forcing inefficient ones to attend to their duties.

Boards of appeal stand in a crucial position. It is their function to see that no applicant is denied his constitutional rights because of any physical condition or peculiar situation of his property. What is done by such a board is expected, however, to be done legally, that is, as laid down in the law, and with full consideration of the interests of the community and of adjoining property owners, as well as of the applicant. The desire of an applicant, or his chance to profit if he may violate the law, does not come within his constitutional rights. When a zoning law has been passed in the interests of the health, safety and general welfare of the people, it can generally be enforced if the people insist upon enforcement and if officials take advantage of means provided by law for enforcement.

LEGISLATION—1926.

The main item of legislation proposed last year to protect streets laid down in the right places was defeated. Secretary Hoover's special committee working on standard planning and zoning laws for the country has adopted the principles of the Massachusetts bill. Since the entire country is working in this same direction, the Massachusetts bill is being

entered for 1927, and its passage will again be urged.

In view of the constant blocking of mapped streets by the erection of buildings, and the many millions of dollars being spent to correct such situations and situations where no planning was previously done, it is obvious that the planning ahead of developments must be more extensive and that such planning must be protected. The scheme proposed for Massachusetts and now advised by Mr. Hoover's committee for the entire country will have to be adopted, unless a better plan for doing this essential work can be found.

REGIONAL PLANNING

Much careful study is being given to regional planning in many parts of this country and throughout other countries. The effective functioning of main traffic ways between large cities depends upon proper regional plans. These large cities may be within one state or any two of them may be in different states. Regional planning is essential to solve the problem. The imaginary line that bounds a city or a town does not stop a street, a railroad or a river. These things go on, regardless of imaginary lines. The proper use of the rivers and the proper development of streets, roads and railways depend upon co-operative planning, i. e., regional planning.

In Massachusetts main ways are too often looked upon as merely engineering problems. Without doubt they are engineering and economic problems, but, at base, they are social problems. The effect of every main way, say from Boston to the New York state line, must be considered in the light of its effects on every city and town through which it passes.

There are many regions within Massachusetts which are already suffering from the lack of special study. The state as a whole needs such a study. New England as a region needs it, both for its internal problems and in view of its relationship with the state of New York, Canada and the ocean. These problems do not solve themselves. Legislation is needed to permit such studies and to carry them into effect.

THE FEDERATION OF PLANNING BOARDS.

At the annual meeting of the Federation in Salem regional planning in all of its aspects was urged by the three chief speakers and this urge was seconded by all present. Outside of metropolitan Boston, Massachusetts has no law enabling or permitting any kind of regional planning. Here is a defect to be remedied. At the same time some kind of co-operative study should be developed, among the various New England states, and between these states and New York and Canada.

The conference pointed to the need for action along these lines and authorized the chairman, in co-operation with the department, to establish a committee to consider especially what might be done towards the development of a state plan.

The table shows the present status of planning boards in Massachusetts cities and towns:

ACTIVE			INACTIVE	CONSIDERING BOARDS
Amesbury	Greenfield	Fittsfield	Hudson*	Agawam*
Amherst*	Haverhill	Plymouth	Medfield*	Chatham*
Andover	Hingham*	Quincy	Milford	Concord*
Arlington	Holyoke	Reading*	Northbridge	Littleton*
Ashland*	Hudson*	Revere		Lunenburg*
Attleborough	Lawrence	Salem		Lynnfield*
Auburn*	Leominster	Saugus		Marlborough
Barnstable*	Lexington*	Shrewsbury*		Middleborough*
Bedford*	Longmeadow*	Somerville		Newburyport
Belmont	Lowell	Southbridge		North Andover*
Beverly	Lynn	Springfield		No. Attleborough*
Boston	Malden	Stoneham*		Orange*
Bourne*	Mansfield*	Stoughton*		Peabody
Braintree	Marblehead*	Taunton	No BOARD	Petersham*
Brockton	Maynard*	Tisbury*		Plainfield*
Brookline	Medfield*	Wakefield	Adams	Sandwich*
Cambridge	Medford	Walpole*	Chelsea	Wareham*
Chicopee	Melrose	Waltham	Danvers	Westwood*
Clinton	Methuen	Watertown	Gardner	
Dartmouth*	Milford	Wayland*	Marlborough	
Dedham	Milton	Webster	Newburyport	
Duxbury*	Natick	Wellesley*	Peabody	
Easthampton	Needham*	Westfield		
Everett	New Bedford	Weston*		
Fairhaven	Newton	West Springfield		
Fall River	North Adams	Weymouth		
Falmouth*	Northampton	Winchester		
Fitchburg	Northbridge	Winthrop		
Framingham	Norwood	Woburn		
Franklin*	Oak Bluffs*	Worcester		
Gloucester	Palmer	Yarmouth*		
Great Barrington*	Paxton*			

* Under 10,000 population.

In places where boards are reported as inactive, and in places where boards have not been established, although they are required by law, the people should take steps to secure action. The people are the sufferers from inaction, and they will have to act if they desire results.

CITIES AND TOWNS WHICH HAVE BEEN ZONED.

COMPREHENSIVE		USE		INTERIM	
Brockton ¹	Nov., 1920	Winthrop ¹	Mar., 1922	Westfield	July, 1922
Brookline* ¹	May, 1922	Milton*	July, 1922	Revere	Apr., 1925
Longmeadow* ¹	July, 1922	Holyoke	Sept., 1923	Taunton	Sept., 1925
Springfield* ¹	Dec., 1922	Winchester*	Mar., 1924	Newburyport	Aug., 1925
Newton* ¹	Dec., 1922	Swampscott* ¹	Apr., 1924	Gloucester	Mar., 1926
W. Springfield* ¹	May, 1923	Dedham* ¹	May, 1924		
Cambridge ¹	Jan., 1924	Chelsea	June, 1924		
Lexington* ¹	Mar., 1924	Paxton	Dec., 1924		
Melrose* ¹	Mar., 1924	Worcester ¹	Dec., 1924		
Arlington* ¹	May, 1924	Wellesley*	Mar., 1925		
Boston* ¹	June, 1924	Salem*	Nov., 1925		
Woburn	Jan., 1925				
Belmont* ¹	Jan., 1925				
Needham* ¹	Mar., 1925				
Walpole* ¹	Mar., 1925				
Stoneham* ¹	Mar., 1925				
Waltham* ¹	July, 1925				
Haverhill ¹	Oct., 1925				
Medford* ¹	Oct., 1925				
Wakefield* ¹	Nov., 1925				
North Adams ¹	Dec., 1925				
Somerville ¹	Dec., 1925				
New Bedford* ¹	Dec., 1925				
Watertown* ¹	Jan., 1926				
Fairhaven* ¹	Feb., 1926				
Falmouth* ¹	Apr., 1926				
Reading* ¹	May, 1926				
Lynn* ¹	June, 1926				
Lowell*	July, 1926				
Malden*	July, 1926				
Everett	July, 1926				

* Provides for single family districts. ¹ Has front yard provisions.

CITIES AND TOWNS AT WORK ON ZONING.

Amesbury
Attleborough
Barnstable
Beverly
Bourne
Braintree
Chatham
Chicopee

Clinton
Duxbury
Fall River
Framingham
Hingham
Leominster
Marblehead
Marion

Medfield
Northampton
Norwood
Saugus
Southbridge
Weston
Yarmouth

ZONING UNDER CONSIDERATION.

Bedford
Concord
Dartmouth
Fitchburg
Gloucester
Great Barrington

Lunenburg
Palmer
Newburyport
North Attleborough
Petersham
Pittsfield

Revere
Taunton
Westborough
Westwood

HOUSING EXPERIMENT AT LOWELL.

The condition of the housing experiment at Lowell remains unchanged with payments on the houses erected going on regularly.

A statement of the money spent and the money paid back into the State treasury is as follows:—

Appropriation (made in 1917)	\$50,000.00
Expenses:	
Land purchased, 7 acres with room for 40 houses, including also one house standing on lot	\$12,500.00
Cost of 12 houses	28,128.77
Improvements	2,626.77
	<hr/>
	\$43,255.54
	<hr/>
	\$6,744.46

STATEMENT TO NOVEMBER 30, 1926.

Lot Number	Sale Price	Paid on Principal	Interest	Principal Unpaid Nov. 30, 1926
2	\$3,100.00	\$1,182.87	\$951.45	\$1,917.13
3	2,900.00	1,249.38	950.62	1,650.62
4	2,900.00	910.95	678.80	1,989.05
5	2,900.00	1,263.18	957.82	1,636.82
6	2,450.00	973.59	750.22	1,476.41
7	2,450.00	953.31	633.97	1,496.69
8	2,900.00	1,176.99	847.76	1,723.01
9	2,400.00	965.87	740.66	1,434.13
10	2,425.00	1,006.42	750.33	1,418.58
11	3,000.00	1,303.83	992.42	1,696.17
12	2,900.00	2,900.00	908.67
13	3,100.00	1,361.04	1,033.96	1,738.96
Totals	\$33,425.00	\$15,247.43	\$10,196.68	\$18,177.57

REPORTS OF PLANNING BOARDS.

Amesbury. A zoning scheme is in preparation, plans are being studied, and traffic regulations are under consideration.

Amherst. A zoning scheme is in preparation.

Andover. In its first year the board has considered the various problems, and will recommend action in some direction at the next town meeting.

Arlington. The town plan is used in guiding development. The board reports too many requests for zoning changes.

Ashland. Studying land developments; taking steps towards improving the layout of central highways.

Attleborough. No report.

Auburn. No report.

Barnstable. First year devoted to a general study, to educational work and to the establishing of building lines, a tentative zoning regulation and control of developments.

Bedford. Working on plans and zoning.

Belmont. Working with requests for changes in zone lines and playground studies, with some consideration of general plans.

Beverly. Zoning scheme in preparation. Other features will be taken up when zoning is finished.

Boston. An outstanding piece of work is an entirely new city map, 800 feet to the inch. This is probably as accurate as one may reasonably expect. The board has also worked out a block census for comparative studies as to movements of population, with reference to its bearing upon transportation, recreation and other facilities. Special studies have been made on the improvement of South Bay and Fort Point Channel. Additional studies have been made on passenger and vehicular traffic, as affecting the downtown district, and the board has cooperated in developing an advisory committee on traffic. The board supports South Boston-East Boston Ferry. The heavy passenger traffic between these two points now clears through Atlantic Avenue.

Bourne. A zoning scheme in preparation. Some preliminary consideration of plans.

Braintree. The year devoted mainly to preparing a zoning scheme. Some study of building lines, street adjustments and playground needs.

Brockton. Consideration of frequent requests for business in residence districts. (Newspaper reports indicate lax enforcement of the zoning law, which always brings cumulative troubles.)

Brookline. The chief activities of the year have been hearings on petitions for changes in zones; discussion of proper location for extension of West Roxbury Parkway through Brookline. The board cooperates with the board of survey in regulating land developments, and is studying elements of the general plan.

Cambridge. Active mainly with zoning appeals and street adjustment problems.

Chicopee. No report.

Clinton. The board recommends improvements in street lighting, a comfort station, regulation of traffic and parking. (The board calls attention to the growth of zoning, but seems to have little local support.)

Dartmouth. No report.

Dedham. The zoning scheme is raising but few questions. The board is studying through traffic routes, readjustment of street system and the location of parkways and schools.

Duxbury. The board has suggested a community center, correction of dangerous corners, control of traffic, improvement (landscape) of public property, consideration of future sewerage system, and control of natural water courses. The board favors but the people are indifferent to zoning.

Easthampton. No report.

Everett. A comprehensive plan is under consideration, relating to the elimination of dangerous corners, street extensions, street widenings, unsightly billboards, study of paving in connection with density of vehicular traffic.

Fairhaven. The main work has been the adoption of zoning and the development of its administration.

Fall River. Zoning has been held up because of opposition. The board hopes for favorable action, which will open the way for additional work.

Falmouth. Zoning has been adopted, and its administration is being studied and improved, through traffic needs are being studied, and building lines are being established. Citizens have given the town a fine water front property.

Fitchburg. The board is also the board of survey, which has caused its main activity. Studies of the street needs and of traffic problems are under way, and zoning is being considered.

Framingham. No report.

Franklin. The board reports no activities. A bequest for planting, playgrounds, parks, etc., offers opportunity.

Gloucester. No report.

Great Barrington. No report.

Greenfield. No report.

Haverhill. Preliminary work on widening and extension of certain streets for the purpose of relieving traffic congestion has been done, traffic and parking problems being serious. The zoning scheme is reported as giving satisfaction.

Hingham. An increase in traffic problems which planning and zoning would help to solve. As a park board, the board has been authorized to purchase 86,500 square feet of water front property at a cost of about \$25,000.00.

Holyoke. No report.

Hudson. The board makes no claims of activity, and points to lack of public support as the main cause.

Lawrence. The board is cooperating in selecting a site for and developing an auditorium. Little progress is being made towards planning and zoning.

Leominster. The year has been one of great activity for the city, in readjusting and surfacing many streets. The board is actively at work on the main elements of a plan and on a zoning scheme.

Lexington. The town's problems are largely due to land development schemes for which there is not sufficient power of regulation. There are some petitions for alterations in zoning, and studies are being made of thorough ways and park developments.

Longmeadow. No report.

Lowell. No report.

Lynn. No report.

Malden. Speculators are causing problems, but the zoning scheme aids in regulation. General plans are being studied.

Mansfield. The board claims no activity of any kind.

Marion. A zoning scheme is in preparation and the main problems of the town plan are being studied, but no definite action has been taken. The zoning scheme is strongly urged by the board.

Marblehead. No report.

Maynard. No report.

Medfield. The town voted against zoning, and the board has ceased to function.

Medford. The board advises action on planning because of traffic problems which main thoroughfares would help to solve. Changes in the zoning scheme sought for personal advantage are opposed by the city government and the planning board.

Melrose. The board is working on building lines, on a general plan and on an assessment map, and making a strong effort to uphold the zoning law.

Methuen. The board strongly urges the preparation of a zoning scheme and is at work on several street and development problems.

Milford. No report.

Milton. No report.

Natick. A town plan has been partly developed, some work has been done on zoning, a building code is in preparation, and the board advises on street layouts.

Needham. No report.

New Bedford. The zoning scheme is favorably received except by

those who seek special privileges which it does not allow. The board is actively considering and effecting street adjustments and traffic regulation, and is aiding in the administration of the zoning law and in other ways.

Newton. The board finds its chief need in legislation to enable it to protect the city plan, along the lines worked out by the planning boards and by Mr. Hoover's committee. Efforts to upset the zoning scheme are quite successfully resisted. Acting as a board of survey, the board has much development work to consider, and effective results are being secured in this direction.

North Adams. The board cooperates towards the effective administration of the zoning law, and on a new assessing system, and is studying traffic and building line problems. It advises regional studies for the Berkshire district.

Northampton. Because of encroachments, zoning is being considered and an interim ordinance will probably be passed.

Northbridge. The board has found no problems requiring its attention.

Norwood. The plan is being adjusted to meet the traffic and playground problems, and work towards the adoption of a zoning scheme has been pushed.

Oak Bluffs. The board is preparing a town map and working towards control of development schemes. Certain water front property is being secured on the advice of the board. Building regulations are being prepared.

Palmer. The board is considering planning and zoning, but is not hopeful of the support of the people.

Paxton. No report.

Pittsfield. No report.

Plymouth. The board is studying a by-pass for through traffic, cooperates in the study of special problems, and hopes to get a zoning scheme under way.

Quincy. The board is working on traffic problems, building lines, street adjustments and towards the adoption of a zoning scheme.

Reading. Zoning is the year's chief accomplishment. It is raising no serious problems as yet.

Revere. Appropriations being refused, no zoning or planning studies have been made. In the meantime traffic problems and the intrusion of improper uses continue.

Salem. The board has worked mainly for proper zoning administration and on building lines, street adjustments and water front development.

Saugus. The board is actively at work on a zoning scheme and on the development of a sewerage system. The town reports much injury from haphazard development.

Shrewsbury. In its first year the board has cooperated with the board of survey on regulating land developments, on public dumps, sewage problems and the adjusting of dangerous corners.

Somerville. No report.

Southbridge. No report.

Springfield. The board continues its work for effective zoning administration and for conforming all developments to the adopted plan. It is restudying several problems of street location and school sites, and reports that an important scheme of water front development has been brought to a head. (This was done through the cooperation of several boards and the railroad and other interests.)

Stoneham. No report.

Stoughton. The board is working on a sewerage system, on elements of the street plan, and advises a zoning scheme.

Taunton. The board continues to recommend zoning, but receives no

appropriation for preparation of a scheme. It advises building lines and cooperates towards proper street developments.

Tisbury. In its first year the board advised a new thoroughfare which was not accepted. It is cooperating on a school development plan and advises zoning.

Wakefield. No report.

Walpole. The board reports a tendency towards laxness in administration of the zoning law. The board has helped with a plan for park development and a program for sidewalk construction.

Waltham. No report.

Watertown. No report.

Wayland. No report.

Webster. A building code is being developed and traffic problems are being studied.

Wellesley. The board is studying the possibilities of the board of survey law, beginning a study of the main plan, and cooperating towards effective zoning administration.

Westfield. No report.

Weston. The board is at work on a comprehensive plan and on a zoning scheme.

West Springfield. No report.

Weymouth. No report.

Winchester. The board actively supports the zoning scheme, and cooperates towards satisfactory results on all matters affecting the main plan of the town.

Winthrop. No report.

Woburn. No report.

Worcester. The board and the board of survey, working in full cooperation, are producing good results in regulating land developments. The two boards are working for a contour map of the city, and on several features of a main city plan. Appropriations are being sought for extensive street adjustments.

Yarmouth. In its first year the board has prepared a plan for readjusting the street system and a zoning scheme. The board specially urges action along all lines that will protect the character, beauty and individuality of the town.